

10cc

THE CLEVEREST BAND IN BRITAIN

Words: David Cavanagh

From their studio in Stockport, the four original members of 10cc devised their blend of pristine pop and sophisticated humour. We learn about their fabulous inventions, foot-long telexes from Richard Branson and a reincarnated pharaoh: “Mad schemes... crazy stuff!”

AUTUMNAL BROWNS AND greens bathe the land around Lol Creme’s house. He built it in 1976, a few miles outside Leatherhead in Surrey, with his share of the money that rolled in from 10cc. Creme left the band that same year, and has felt no urge to rejoin, but he’s never sold “the house that 10cc built” – not even when he moved to Los Angeles in 1989 to direct a film and stayed for 14 years.

Creme is short, gnome-like and artistic. The walls of his wood-panelled den are lined with his own paintings; as an art student, he dreamed of being a Disney animator. Now 65, he limits his musical activities to a part-time band with Trevor Horn, The Producers. When Creme reminisces about 10cc, he does so in the excitable language of a boy. “Mad schemes... doing all sorts of crazy stuff... the most fantastic blast of my life!” Creme, though not the leader, sang early hits like “Rubber Bullets” and “The Dean And I”, in a cute voice that belied the songs’ complexity. And boy were they complex. They sounded like musicals written by comedy writers. Journalists dubbed 10cc “The Cleverest Band In Britain”. Creme insists they were “satirical rather than cynical. I wouldn’t like anyone to think of me as a cynic.”

Graham Gouldman, co-writer of “Art For Art’s Sake”, “I’m Not In Love” and “I’m Mandy Fly Me”, finds a table in a Marylebone High Street patisserie and orders fresh orange juice. It’s the afternoon rush. Trays crash. Babies scream. Gouldman is 66, but has a youthful sharpness, often answering questions before they’re out of my mouth. “We weren’t a pop group,” he stresses. “But it wasn’t a rock band either. There was never a band like 10cc – in the same way that there’s never been a band like Led Zeppelin.” He hopes their 40th anniversary boxset, *Tenology*, which includes discs of B-sides and album tracks, will help to reverse a



“We were
a self-
contained
unit. It was
what I
would call
a dream
band”

GRAHAM GOULDMAN

tendency to regard 10cc as a middle-of-the-road oldies act.

Kevin Godley, who played drums and sang like an angel even when he was warning of cannibals lurking in trees (“Hotel”), is walking his dog on the beach at Kilcoole in County Wicklow. It’s a quiet evening and there’s nobody around. Godley lives in nearby Newtownmountkennedy (“a pain in the arse to spell”) where he’s been developing his new invention, an app called WholeWorldBand which allows musicians to collaborate on an audiovisual platform. Godley’s come a long way from 10cc, but shares Gouldman’s irritation that their legacy isn’t quite what it should be.

“I feel strongly that musically we were damn good,” he says. “It annoys me that we’re never in the list of names of bands who were influential in the ’70s. Roxy Music, Bowie, Queen. Where the hell are 10cc?”

BANDS COME TOGETHER for different reasons. Similar tastes. Friends from school. Adverts in magazines. But only one band got together after making a Leslie Crowther Christmas single and writing a song for

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